Home Wherever You Are by BlueClue182

Series: February Fluff Challenge [2]
Category: Stranger Things (TV 2016)
Genre: F/M, February Fluff Fest, Fluff
Language: English
Characters: Dustin Henderson, Eleven (Stranger Things), Jonathan Byers, Lucas Sinclair, Maxine "Max" Mayfield, Mike Wheeler, Nancy Wheeler, Will Byers
Relationships: Eleven/Mike Wheeler, Will Byers & Eleven & Dustin Henderson & Lucas Sinclair & Mike Wheeler
Status: Completed
Published: 2018-02-02
Updated: 2018-02-02
Packaged: 2022-04-20 16:35:58
Rating: General Audiences
Warnings: No Archive Warnings Apply
Chapters: 1
Words: 686
Publisher: archiveofourown.org
Summary:

Summer arrives and the kids enjoy a day at the lake. Mike and Eleven stare at each other like the lovesick goons that they are.

Prompt: "You smell so good."

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Author's Note:

> February fluff challenge day two! I tried to do a "smells like..." without using adjectives, because I've convinced myself that this is a legitimate writing exercise. Another loosely interpreted prompt.
> Thanks again to beta Goku/Sarah!

Mike rolls over on the towel that they're sharing, laying on his belly and turning the page in a yellowed paperback. He looks over and catches her staring. She can't know what he's thinking, not in the moment, but he tells her later. She looks like happiness, which seems impossible after everything she's been through.

He's thinking that the air around her, the negative space between her and whatever gets to exist closest to her, is filled with sugary maple syrup. It has the aroma of childhood sweat—the kind before the hormones kick in, the kind that smells like playgrounds and bike rides and front hallways after everyone has peeled off their snow suits and come in for some soup. Innocent and easy. But there is also iron and copper, fresh blood. Eleven smells like the fire that burns inside her—the one that made her step between the boys, her friends and the Demogorgon. Eleven smells like electricity.

She smiles at him, her hair flopping over her sunglasses. He smiles back, and then returns to his book. He is in a constant cloud of sweet basement musk. Of things well-loved: dog-eared books with broken spines, game manuals marked up and rearranged in binders, eraser shavings, blankets pulled from the dryer and wrapped around your shoulders. He's the forest at the tail end of a day-long rainstorm. He's something fresh and new and ready to begin. Ideas about to spill over and change the world. Save the world.
The wind picks up and, somehow, she smells like all the people she loves. The flowers she arranges with Joyce. The crayons she's painstakingly organized by color with Will. The barbeque sauce and charcoal from grilling dinner with Hopper. Mike wonders if he's added something to that list. He hopes so. He smiles into his book, but he can't really focus. The year of hiding is almost up—she can

start school with the Party soon, and then how will he get anything done? Will she come to AV Club meetings? Sit in the confined space and make him dizzy?

She has thought about school, too, but she doesn't know what to expect any more than he does. Will she be able to find Mike, in among all the other kids with their own signature scents? Can she locate him if she follows the skidding bike tires? Maybe the chocolate he always seems to have under his fingernails? Of course. It won't matter where they are, or how many other people are there. Even at the park, or on a walk through the woods, or sitting by the lake two towns over laying on Nancy's beach towel while she and Jonathan swim around in lazy, doggy paddled circles. Mike brings the smell of opening the front door at a friend's house. Warm.

She leans over and kisses his shoulder. Eleven wears strawberry chapstick. Or maybe Cherry? It smells like stolen kisses by the light of the TV at night. Like the Snow Ball—no—not the Snow Ball itself, but the anticipation leading up to it. She smells like the air before a blizzard, like the radio announcing school was cancelled for the third day in a row. El's chapstick smells like her smile.

"What?" She's still staring, ignoring cheers from Will and Lucas as Max and Dustin wrestle each other off the edge of the pier. He knows 'what'. He knows why she stares, just like she knows why he does it. But he likes to hear it. Sometimes, when she doesn't have the words, she looks away and mumbles something, and because friends don't lie, it's usually just "pretty". Today, she surprises him.

"You smell really nice. Like home."

"You smell like home, too."

Dustin shakes out his curls close enough that he gets the pages of Mike's book wet, and splashes against El's sunglasses. The spell is broken. Mike throws the book in the sand and jumps up. "Now you're in for it!" He chases after Dustin, who has already turned and run back to the pier.

Eleven laughs, inhaling deeply and sighing. "Home."